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MONTANA TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

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TRANPLAN 21 PROGRESSING

PRODUCTIVE DIALOGUE HELPS MDT IDENTIFY IMPORTANT ISSUES

During the past months, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has been listening to citizens and transportation interests around the state. MDT has asked the Montana community to identify important issues and give direction to TranPlan 21, its current planning effort. This included public open houses in Butte, Great Falls, Missoula, Kalispell, Miles City and Billings. MDT representatives also met with a variety of transportation interests and providers in the state and have recently met with representatives from all tribal governments. In addition, the Department received a number of letters and phone calls expressing individual ideas and concerns.

These opportunities showed MDT that many Montanans share similar concerns about the current system and a common vision for the future.

What Do Some Montanans Think About Transportation Issues?

Here are some of the most frequently mentioned bigger issues and concerns:

Some Montanans would like to see the State's role in the transportation system include all modes.

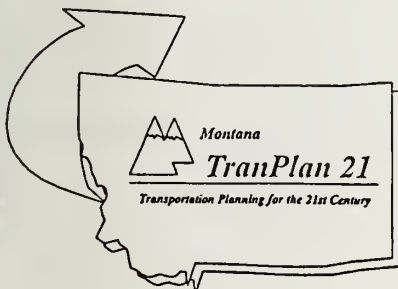
While most participants realized that the car will continue to be an important means of transportation, they also thought it is time to start providing alternatives. Some participants suggested MDT make sure that new development can accommodate public transportation, bicycles, and

pedestrians. Where it makes sense, participants thought that provisions for these alternative modes should be included in all major rehabilitation and new projects. Some were also concerned about the mobility needs of those dependent on public transportation. The need for better intercity bus, rail, and air connections between Montana's cities and the state and other parts of the nation were also mentioned. Participants requested that MDT work with public and private providers on maintaining and improving these services.

Some Montanans are asking MDT to balance the different transportation needs of the western and eastern parts of the state.

The decreasing population in eastern Montana makes it

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difficult to maintain facilities needed to preserve the economic vitality of the region and connect its residents to services and commerce in other parts of the state. Growth and increased tourism in western Montana make improvements to the transportation system necessary to prevent congestion and deteriorating air quality. However, there aren't enough transportation dollars to meet all needs. This makes it very difficult but all the more important for MDT to efficiently distribute scarce funds to both balance needs and maintain an efficient transportation system.

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Montana Department of
Transportation
Transportation Planning Division
2701 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001
(406)444-7646
TDD (406)444-7696



Some Montanans are concerned about the overall relationship between transportation and the quality of life.

Many participants asked MDT to make sure that transportation decisions aren't made in a vacuum but consider their impact on communities, the quality of life of Montanans, the economy, and the environment. These diverse goals often require MDT to reconcile often conflicting visions of the future. One example is Highway 93 between Kalispell and Missoula. Downtown Kalispell suffers from too much traffic and heavy trucks. The suggested bypass would remove trucks from the city's center, but it would also entice some of the tourists which are the city's major industry to simply pass the town. It may bring even more traffic to the region and increase air quality problems, disturb sensitive areas, and promote dispersed development, reducing the scenic beauty and quality of life in the region even further. Residents expect MDT to work with local communities, the tourism industry, and state and federal agencies to address

these issues and find acceptable solutions.

Some Montanans see a need to support economic vitality and development in Montana.

Many participants requested MDT recognize the importance of a functioning freight transportation system that allows the business community in the state to compete effectively. In addition to providing a functioning highway system, some participants asked MDT to take an active role in ensuring the viability of remaining branch rail lines addressing the potential impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and increasing communication and negotiation with federal and Canadian agencies to ensure that the state's freight industry and producers can compete effectively.

These examples show only a small but central portion of the issues that concern Montanans. The following months will challenge MDT to work on feasible and acceptable solutions to these

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and other issues identified by this first round of meetings. This will require the Department to carefully evaluate its role and mandate, face difficult decisions, and continue the dialogue with citizens, local, tribal, state, and federal agencies, the private sector, and other transportation interests. Stay tuned, and be prepared this summer to help MDT identify the strategies and actions most likely to succeed in addressing these and other issues.

TranPlan 21 Moves into Stage II

MDT would like to thank all of you who participated in Stage I - Issue Identification of TranPlan 21. We appreciate your interest in the State's transportation system and the development of our first statewide transportation plan.

Presently, MDT is going through the myriad of issues identified during phase I of public and stakeholder involvement. MDT is using your issues to help define TranPlan 21's broad policy goals. These goals will become the transportation priority of TranPlan 21. Figure 1 shows a sample of some of the potential policy goals MDT may enact.

Policy goals reflect the State's transportation priorities.

As MDT develops the policy goals for TranPlan 21, we are also working to translate those policy goals into general tasks for action. These tasks, or "strategies and actions" are being developed through extensive research and analysis. Each potential strategy and action will be evaluated by criteria such as user cost; overall

social and economic impacts; environmental impacts; agency cost; and public and private sector productivity. Figure 1 shows a sample of the areas in which strategies & actions may be developed.

Strategies and actions are the required tasks to help MDT achieve the policy goals.

TranPlan 21 needs your participation

The candidate strategies and actions will be the subject of the next round of regional meetings and customer focus group meetings. Late this summer MDT representatives will be asking for your input on candidate strategies and actions. We want to hear what you think, and what ideas you may have.

Please stay tuned. Within the next several months you will receive another mailing announcing the dates, times and locations of the next public meetings. Meantime, if you have any questions or comments about TRANPLAN 21, please call our hotline at 1-800-714-7296 (in Helena dial 444-6101).

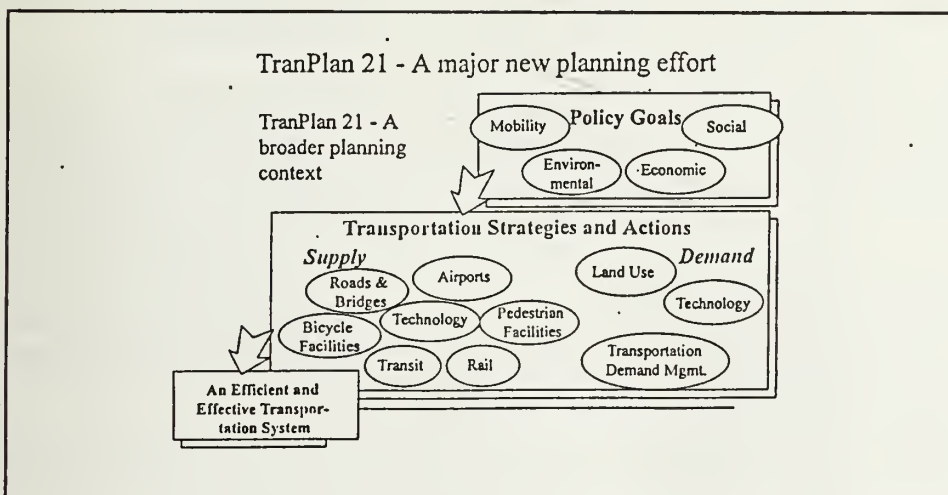


Figure 1

Other Happenings in the Transportation Planning Division

Montana Department of Transportation Announces FY '95 Capital Assistance Recipients

The Montana Department of Transportation's Transit Section is pleased to announce successful recipients of the FY '95 Section 16 Capital Assistance Grant Program. The Transit Section received 23 formal capital assistance applications this year and will have enough Federal dollars to fund 11 projects.

Congratulations go to the following agencies:

- Special Transportation, Inc., Billings - One 17-passenger small bus with lift
- Camas-Hot Springs Senior Citizens - One 17-passenger small bus with lift
- Northern Cheyenne Elderly Program, Lame Deer - One 17-passenger small bus with lift
- Hospitality House, Big Timber - One 17-passenger small bus with lift
- Richland County COA, Sidney - One 17-passenger small bus with lift

- Northern Gateway Enterprises, Conrad - One 17-passenger small bus with lift

- Missoula Aging Services - One 17-passenger small bus with lift

- Mission Mountain Enterprises, Ronan - One 17-passenger small bus with lift

- Spring Meadow Resources, Inc., Helena - One 13-passenger conversion van with lift

- Hollowtop Senior Citizens, Pony - One 13-passenger conversion van with lift

- Dillon Special Resources - One 13-passenger conversion van with lift

Transit Training

The Transit Section is offering training for drivers and managers. The training sessions offered in 1994 include Passenger Assistance Techniques and Sensitivity; Transit Driver Education; and Safe Transport of the Public Under ADA. The sessions are located throughout the state at various dates during the year. Contact Sheri Medow Smith

at (406)444-6120 to obtain the 1994 training schedule.

Final Drug and Alcohol Testing Rules Out

The US Department of Transportation has released the final drug and alcohol rules for each of their administrations. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) rules apply to Sections 3, 9, and 18 grantees. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) rules apply to persons who are required to have a Commercial Drivers License for their job. The implementation time frame for the FTA rules is January 1, 1996 for transit organizations in Montana. The implementation time frame for the FHWA rules is January 1, 1995 for large employers (50 or more drivers) or January 1, 1996 for small employers (fewer than 50 drivers).

The Department is hosting a FTA sponsored training session on the FTA final drug and alcohol testing rules June 1-3, 1994 in Helena. As a reminder, this training is mandatory for all Montana's Sections 3 and 18 grantees.

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For more information on these rules, contact Sheri Medow Smith at (406)444-6120.

Rail Plan Ready to Roll

The Montana Department of Transportation recently published the 1993 Montana Rail Plan Update. The Update was prepared by the Rail and Transit Division (Transportation Planning Division) and the consulting firm, Corporate Strategies, Inc. of Springfield, Virginia. The Update identifies potential rail projects for construction and/or rehabilitation and includes comprehensive overview and line analyses of the rail freight and passenger network. You may obtain a copy of the Update by contacting Jan Vogel at (406)444-4262.

Scenic Byways Study Forges Ahead

MDT's Scenic Byways Feasibility Study has progressed rapidly since it's beginning last October.

The consultant team of Morrison-Maierle Environmental, Communications Strategies, and Design Workshop began the study by taking an in-depth look at what other states have done with their state scenic byways programs. The survey showed that some states, such as Idaho, have basic programs that just sign scenic routes while other states have programs that include extensive promotional efforts and public-private partnerships. The San Juan Skyway in Colorado, for example, is widely promoted by the State, Forest Service, and local groups and

development costs come from several sources. The survey also found some States have programs with major problems. In California, for example, the Department of Transportation is attempting to increase the quality and marketability of it's program by eliminating routes with marginal scenic values. In general, the contacted states recommended small, high quality programs with extensive promotional efforts.

The consultant team also looked at management costs associated with scenic byways programs and possible funding sources. MDT is very concerned about this issue because of the other pressing needs of the transportation system and the Departments' limited ability to manage new programs. A Montana Scenic Byway Program would probably

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have to be managed with existing resources given these constraints.

In other developments, potential selection criteria for a scenic byways program were presented to the 22 member Advisory Committee at its March meeting. The Committee members were asked which criteria were most important from their perspective and the members were most supportive of the following criteria and program structure:

- Selection criteria rather than mileage limits or

regional quotas should guide route designation.

- A Montana Scenic Byways Program should have more than one tier. The Committee felt this would help insure that all regions of the state could participate in the program.

- Each nominated route must be outstanding in at least one of these qualities: Scenic/Visual, Scientific/Educational, Historic/Cultural, Natural Features, Recreational Opportunities.

- Nominated routes should have strong local support

The Advisory Committee will meet again in late May to provide additional feedback on the potential design of the program.

Following the completion of the Scenic Byways Feasibility Study in July, MDT will have the information necessary to decide whether Montana can develop and manage a successful scenic byways program. ■

Montana Department of Transportation
Transportation Planning Division
2701 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena Montana 59620-1001
(406)444-3423
TDD (406)444-7696

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